

# Less Sex and Alcohol for Today's Teens

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Teenagers today are less likely to smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol or have sex than their peers 15 years ago, according to a national study released Thursday by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The study found that 54% of high school students last year had smoked one cigarette in their lifetime, compared with 70% in 1991. The percentage of students who had at least one alcoholic drink dropped to 74% last year from 82% in 1991.

And during the same period, students reporting at least one sexual experience declined from 54% to 47%.

"The new report highlights some very good news," said Howell Wechsler, director of the CDC's Division of Adolescent and School Health. "We're delighted to see some progress."

But he said the statistics were "not going down fast enough."

The survey has been conducted every two years since 1991. It asks high school students about a variety of behaviors, including how much exercise they get, how often they wear seat belts and whether they have contemplated suicide.

Nearly 14,000 public and private high schools participated in the latest survey, conducted in 40 states and 21 cities and counties.

The statistics for Los Angeles largely followed national trends. Between 1997 and 2005, for instance, the percentage of students who had smoked a cigarette declined from 70% to 49%.

The study did not look at why teenagers were making healthier choices. But Dr. Renee Jenkins, chairwoman of the Department of Pediatrics and Child Health at Howard University in Washington, D.C., surmised that education programs on health issues, such as AIDS, had paid off.

The study found that the proportion of sexually active teens using condoms increased from 46% in 1991 to 63% last year.

Not all risky behaviors had declined. Between 1991 and 2005, the rate of students reporting at least one use of marijuana went up from 31% to 38%. The

use of steroids went up in the same period from 2% to 4%.

The study found several instances of sharply different behaviors by white, black and Latino teens. The differences have remained about the same through the years, according to the study.

White students were more likely to smoke frequently or binge drink. Black teens were less likely than whites or Latinos to use tobacco, alcohol, cocaine and other drugs, but most likely to have had sex before age 13.

Latino students were more likely to attempt suicide and use hard drugs. For example, 12% of Latino teens reported using cocaine at least once, compared with 8% of white teens and 2% of black teens, according to the study's latest statistics.